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Eleventh Meeting of Heads of National Drug Law Enforcement Agencies, Europe
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Draft report

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Consideration of topics by working groups

Issue (c): Handling synthetic drug production and responding to changing trends in drug use, new psychoactive substances and precursors

1. The working group held one meeting on 23 June. In its consideration of the topic under review, the working group made the following observations:

(a) The terrain of the synthetic drug use has changed dramatically with the arrival of NPS or so-called legal highs which, while not internationally controlled substances, mimic their effects. Among NPS there are substances that create similar effects as cannabis (synthetic cannabinoids), stimulants (synthetic cathinones and piperazines), hallucinogens (phenethylamines, tryptamines) and heroin (new fentanyls);

(b) Increasing quantities of NPS are being seized in Europe, with synthetic cannabinoids accounting for the majority of new substances reported;

(c) The Internet is an important medium promoting the sale and use of NPS.

2. The working group reached the following conclusions:

(a) Most users of NPS want to buy the "effect" and not specific substances, and do not necessarily know or care about the chemical composition of the drugs they consume;

(b) Interpreting current trends in NPS use and their expansion is difficult as they rarely show up in general population surveys and only to a limited extent in youth surveys;

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(c) Even when NPS manufacture takes place outside Europe, the important part of packaging, labelling, customizing and promoting its use takes place in the region. Therefore there is a need for a collective response and acceptance of shared responsibility to act collectively in countering NPS.

3. The working group made the following recommendations:

(a) Governments are encouraged to urgently address the legal status of NPS, which are also marketed as "legal highs" so as to remove ambiguity in the minds of consumers;

(b) Governments are encouraged to take steps to improve the knowledge of their law enforcement authorities about the manufacture and supply of NPS, including the involvement of organized criminal groups in their trafficking and distribution;

(c) Given the important role the Internet plays in promoting the sale of NPS, as well as the use of the international post and courier systems to deliver the NPS, Governments are encouraged to support their law enforcement agencies establish close working partnerships with the concerned services in the development of new and effective strategies to successfully intercept NPS.